

CHAPTER 49

Al-Hujurât: The Apartments

(REVEALED AT MADÍNAH: 2 sections; 18 verses)

The chapter takes its title from verse 4, which enjoins the Muslims not to call out to the Prophet from behind the private *apartments*. It was revealed to teach good manners as well as good morals when large masses began to enter Islâm and deputation after deputation came to Madînah. The Holy Prophet was not only the spiritual head of a people; he was also a Prophet who had to direct his people in their religious and temporal affairs. He had to decide their cases and to make laws for them; to lead them to prayer, to bow before Allâh and into the field to fight against a powerful enemy; and, therefore, it was necessary that the new converts to Islâm should appreciate the value of his time. It, however, teaches respect not only for the Prophet's privacy but also for each other's privacy.

The chapter was revealed at Madînah in the year 9 A.H. The opening verses are unanimously taken to refer to the time of the visit of the deputation of the Banî Tamîm. As the previous chapter speaks of victories for the Muslims, and as victory brings ease, this chapter denounces the vices of a civilized society living in ease and comfort. Opening with an injunction as to the manners to be observed towards the Holy Prophet, the section is concluded with a direction requiring the Muslims to make peace between Muslims. The second section teaches the Muslims some of the social virtues, and enjoins them to avoid certain vices which are the bane of society, showing that brotherhood in Islâm is not based on the distinctions of tribes and families, but on piety and righteousness.

SECTION 1: Respect for the Prophet

In the name of Allâh, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

1 O you who believe, be not forward in the presence of Allâh and His Messenger, and keep your duty to Allâh. Surely Allâh is Hearing, Knowing.^a

2 O you who believe, raise not your voices above the Prophet's voice, nor speak loudly to him as you speak loudly one to another, lest your deeds become null, while you perceive not.^a

3 Surely those who lower their voices before Allâh's Messenger are they whose hearts Allâh have proved for dutifulness. For them are forgiveness and a great reward.

4 Those who call out to thee from behind the private apartments, most of them have no sense.^a

5 And if they had patience till you come out to them, it would be better for them. And Allâh is Forgiving, Merciful.

6 O you who believe, if an unrighteous **man** brings you news, look carefully into it, lest you harm a people in ignorance, then be sorry for what you did.^a

1a. The *presence of Allâh* means the *presence of His commandments*. The words imply the utmost obedience.

2a. The Qur'ân not only inculcates high morals but also regulates social conduct, because its teachings are intended for all grades of men. When large numbers of men began to enter Islâm such directions became necessary, and they will always be needed by the masses in any society. A loud voice is expressive of arrogance or resentment.

4a. As already pointed out, when the masses began to enter Islâm many of them were ignorant even of the ordinary social rules, and they called out to the Prophet with loud voices while he was within his house. The practice is deprecated because it meant disrespect to the Holy Prophet.

7 And know that among you is Allâh's Messenger. Were he to obey you in many a matter, you would surely fall into distress; but Allâh has endeared the faith to you and has made it seemly in your hearts, and He has made hateful to you disbelief and transgression and disobedience. Such are those who are rightly guided —

8 A grace from Allâh and a favour. And Allâh is Knowing, Wise.

9 And if two parties of the believers quarrel, make peace between them. Then if one of them does wrong to the other, fight that which does wrong, till it return to Allâh's command. Then, if it returns, make peace between them with justice and act equitably. Surely Allâh loves the equitable.^a

10 The believers are brethren so make peace between your brethren, and keep your duty to Allâh that mercy may be had on you.

6a. Such a direction was expedient when a condition of war necessitated prompt action to be taken against the enemy. But even the exigencies of war were to be carried out with the utmost carefulness, so that friendly people should not suffer loss.

9a. It is related that the occasion of the revelation of this verse was a quarrel between the Aus and the Khazraj, the two chief tribes of Madînah; but this does not mean that the verse is applicable only to that case. The verse, in fact, requires the Muslims not to be indifferent when one party of them quarrels with another. In such cases they must bring every kind of pressure within their reach to bear upon the party in error. It is the duty of every Muslim to maintain the unity of Islâm. An attitude of indifference towards *fatwâs* of *kufir*, directed against their own brethren by ignorant Mullâs, has dealt a fatal blow to the union of Muslim brotherhood, and, if the Muslims do not raise their voice against these *fatwâs*, they must never hope to make any progress towards real union.

SECTION 2: Respect for Muslim Brotherhood

11 O you who believe, let not people laugh at people, perchance they may be better than they; nor let women (laugh) at women, perchance they may be better than they. Neither find fault with your own people, nor call one another by nick-names. Evil is a bad name after faith; and whoso turns not, these it is that are the iniquitous.^a

12 O you who believe, avoid most of suspicion, for surely suspicion in some cases is sin; and spy not nor let some of you backbite others. Does one of you like to eat the

flesh of his dead brother? You abhor it! And keep your duty to Allâh, surely Allâh is Oft-returning (to mercy), Merciful.

13 O mankind, surely We have created you from a male and a female, and made you tribes and families that you may know each other. Surely the noblest of you with Allâh is the most dutiful of you. Surely Allâh is Knowing, Aware.^a

14 The dwellers of the desert say: We believe. Say: You believe not, but say, We submit; and faith has not yet entered into your hearts. And if you obey Allâh and His Messenger, He will not diminish aught of your deeds. Surely Allâh is Forgiving, Merciful.^a

11a. This verse and those that follow deal with some of the evils which are most rampant in civilized society, and which corrupt a society to its core. These evils mostly arise with wealth; for, living in ease, people are most concerned with seeking each other's faults, and thus mutual hatred takes the place of brotherly love and friendly concord.

13a. The principle of the brotherhood of human beings laid down here is on the broadest basis. The address here is not to believers, as in the two previous verses, but to human beings in general, who are told that they are all, as it were, members of one family, and their divisions into nations, tribes and families should not lead to estrangement from, but to a better knowledge of, each other. Superiority of one over another in this vast brotherhood does not depend on nationality, wealth, or rank, but on the careful observance of duty, or moral greatness.

15 The believers are those only who believe in Allâh and His Messenger, then they doubt not, and struggle hard with their wealth and their lives in the way of Allâh. Such are the truthful ones.

16 Say: Would you apprise Allâh of your *Dîn*? And Allâh knows what is in the heavens and what is in the earth. And Allâh is Knower of all things.

17 They presume to lay you under an obligation by becoming Muslims. Say: Lay me not under an obligation by your Islâm; rather Allâh lays you under an obligation by guiding you to the faith, if you are truthful.

18 Surely Allâh knows the unseen of the samâwât and the earth. And Allâh is Seer of what you do.

14a. Here the Muslims are enjoined to deal kindly and leniently, even with those who, being novices, were not yet really grounded in the faith, though they were members of the Muslim brotherhood. Faith had not yet entered into their hearts, but they were to be regarded as Muslims. The solidarity of Islâm is being shattered today by narrow-minded Mullâs who, on one pretext or another, issue *fatwâs* of *kuf'r* against this or that party of Muslims.